

FISH & WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: December 11, 2014

Agenda Item: Fish Creek WMA Addition

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Final

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 10 minutes.

Background

FWP proposes to acquire a 148-acre addition to the Fish Creek Wildlife Management Area through a purchase from the Five Valleys Land Trust. The property is a private inholding within the 34,573-acre Fish Creek WMA and is also bordered by Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation lands.

This property was formerly owned by Plum Creek Timber Company and is one of several inholdings that's been sold to private buyers prior to the Nature Conservancy's acquisition of the PCTC lands in Fish Creek. The property is located immediately downstream of the confluence of the South and West Forks of Fish Creek and includes one-half mile of Fish Creek and its associated riparian corridor (25 acres) as well as adjacent upland habitat for elk and other wildlife species. The main stem of Fish Creek provides a key migratory corridor and sub-adult rearing area for fluvial bull trout. Confluence areas are especially important for travel corridors, and these areas often support wider riparian habitats than other areas. In addition to Fish Creek, the property includes approximately one-half mile of a small unnamed creek.

Management of the property would be under the guidance of the Fish Creek WMA and Fish Creek State Park Interim Preliminary Management Plan (FWP 2009). The appraised purchase value of this property is \$350,000. Thompson Falls Mitigation Fund would contribute \$120,000, Trout Unlimited would contribute \$6,000, and the remaining balance would be funded with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Pitman Robertson funds (75 percent) and Habitat Montana funds (if necessary).

Public Involvement Process & Results

FWP released a draft environmental assessment for public review on Oct. 8 and accepted public comment through Nov. 7. A public hearing was held in Alberton on Oct. 21 at the Community Center.

FWP received 78 oral, emailed or written comments, representing 67 people, 11 organizations, and one agency. Individual commenters were from Missoula, Alberton, Superior, Helena, Huson, Whitefish, Billings, Bozeman, Chester, Darby, Emigrant, Hamilton, Kalispell, Stevensville, Thompson Falls, and Victor. Seventy-one commenters supported the acquisition, and four opposed it.

Alternatives and Analysis

The only viable alternative would be to forego this acquisition. The parcel is developable and the adjoining parcel, which was sold recently, is being developed and posted against public access.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

FWP recommends that the Commission approve the purchase of this addition to the Fish Creek WMA. The property has high wildlife habitat and recreation values and is strategic to other lands where FWP retains interest.

Proposed Motion

I move the Commission approve FWP's purchase of this addition to Fish Creek WMA.